SKULL TIME MOVIE JOURNAL

#1

Big First Issue!

So, I suppose a quick introduction / explanation is probably in order….

Let's simply say then, that, back in 2009, I started a weblog at **breakfastintheruins.blogspot.com**, the central focus of which soon became my increasing fascination with various strands of quote-unquote 'cult cinema' - a subject which I proceeded to write about at oft excessive length over the course of the next - *cough* - fifteen years or so.

Since the dawn of the present decade however, the increasing shitification of the blogger platform (and of the internet more generally), combined with the disappearance of the free time which previously allowed me to produce new writing on at least a semi-regular basis, have largely forced me to abandon this questionable hobby.

I don't want to give it up without a fight however, so hence the return to paper.

Some of the writing featured herein has previously appeared on the blog (in very different form), but other stuff is brand new, and this is a mixture I anticipate continuing in the event that I'm able to keep this thing going. Needless to say, if you enjoy this zine, just make your way to the URL above for much (much much) more of the same.

At this stage, I don't feel inclined to place any strict limitation on what is to be covered in SKULL TIME MOVIE JOURNAL - except to note that the clue is in the name. I'm more than happy to talk 'film' or 'cinema' at the drop of a hat, but the focus here is MOVIES, and I trust that readers will have the wit to grok the distinction.

Specifically, priority will be given to movies from the 20th century, genre movies, WEIRD movies, movies from *other places* and other cultures… and did I mention *weird* movies? But, perhaps most importantly, I intend to cover movies that people who take a passing interest in this sort of thing may not have encountered before (or at least, may not have read about fifty bloody times elsewhere).

At the same time though, I hope that this zine will also hold some appeal for the weird movie-curious, and that the assorted cultural references thrown around in the text won't prove off-putting.

All I will say on that score, is that I grew up reading books and magazines in which writers would ceaselessly drop esoteric reference points sans context, and that, personally, I found this bloody-minded obscurantism fascinating and ultimately educational, rather than exclusionary, as the hacks in question may well have intended. And, unlike my teenage self, you have the internet, so you've got no excuse. If there's a reference in here you don't 'get'… just whack it in the nearest search box for goodness sake. See where it leads you.

And, one final note: although I'm unavoidably writing in the first person here, I take no pleasure in the number of "I"s I've burned through above. Should this venture prove a success, I would be *thrilled* to be able to give space to other voices and other perspectives in these pages - so in the event that you've got one, vis-a-vis the loose remit outlined above, see the back page for contact details and what-not.

Meanwhile though, hope you get something out of all this, and hopefully speak again… soon?

BWH, August 2025

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Cinta Terlarang ['Forbidden Love']
(Pitradjaya Burnama, Indonesia, 1995)

Proudly dragging the unique spirit of '80s Indonesian horror/fantasy cinema into the blasted hinterlands of the mid-1990s, Pitradjaya Burnama's 'Cinta Terlarang' opens with two women clad in translucent night-shirts - Ratih (Lela Anggraini) and Nita (Welda Hidayat) - descending a rickety set of stairs to a cobweb-shrouded, fog-drenched subterranean altar chamber. Therein, they announce their intention to exact black magical vengeance upon the father of Ratih's unborn child, who has not only refused to acknowledge his paternal responsibility, but won't even marry her (the bastard!)

Conveniently, all the gear they need for their necromantic business appears to have been neatly stashed away in a trunk, which our heroines extract from a smoking coffin bathed in blue light. After unpacking the requisite ancient grimoire, they promptly change into some rather fetching ceremonial leotards and matching cloaks. "We are going to do what we want," the aspirant witches declare, shortly before the scene begins inexplicably intercutting with footage of dancers writhing in a neon-drenched discotheque (of which more anon).

Right on cue, the reverb-y voice of an apparent demonic entity named Eying

chimes in, telling our heroines - as per the fan-subs on my copy of the film, at least - "your spite of love will be the foundation of our alliance!" A black rooster is duly slaughtered *[in long shot, and I believe the killing is faked, mercifully]* and blood is spilled onto a photograph of the witches' intended victim.

Clearly, this kind of threat to the patriarchal order cannot be allowed to go unchecked, and so, outside the witches' lair, a gang of men armed with machetes and clubs have assembled, apparently taking orders from Ratih's dodgy boyfriend (a disconcertingly elderly, white-haired fellow), along with another guy who seems to be acting as some kind of occult advisor.

After gaining access to the altar chamber, Ratih's well-heeled sugar-daddy belatedly attempts to take the gentlemanly route, apologising to her for his prior conduct and offering her his hand in marriage. Evidently though, it's a bit late for that, and the girls are having none of it.

After responding to the unnamed BF's entreaties with a round of suitably miffed "hmmph!"s, Ratih and Nita strike martial arts poses and - to my absolute delight - begin enthusiastically beating the crap out of loverboy's henchmen, apparently employing an array of supernaturally enhanced fighting skills, including a thrilling demonstration of the ever-popular 'silk scarf fu' technique (also utilised by the villainess in 1984 Indo-fantasy classic 'The Devil's Sword'.)

Regrettably however, in the course of the melee, Ratih ends up getting decapitated by the falling lid of the blue-lit coffin. "You're mean and cruel," her still-sentient severed head spits at the assembled males. "Await my revenge!" "I will come back after 13 full moons," Ratih's voice continues to declaim as Nita grabs her bloody noggin and makes a flying, wire-assisted exit, "and I will bring the sacrificial blood of three male virgins! Remember that! Remember that!"

At which point, I sit back in stunned awe, and offer my humble thanks to whatever unholy deities preside over the unruly world of Indonesian exploitation movies. For once again, Pitradjaya Burnama and his collaborators have hit that perfect sweet-spot of bloody, fantastical craziness which I so crave in this kind of cinema.

Meanwhile though, back on the sweaty dance-floor of Jakarta's Cleopatra Executive Discotheque (the neon signage is fucking amazing), another, rather confusing, storyline begins to unfold, involving some bloke named Andre (Sonny Dewantara, sporting a mighty 'tache), and a woman named Lola (top-billed Sally Marcellina, in a fetish-y combo of lace and leather).

At the end of the night, Andre (who turns out to be the son of Ratih's white-haired boyfriend) goes home with Lola (who may or may not be fulfilling the role of a prostitute - it's a little unclear). Before they can get it on back at her pad though, Lola falls asleep, prompting Andre to deliver a "hmm, oh well.." type smile/sigh, before he gently tucks her into bed and leaves - thus establishing him as a slightly nicer chap than his father, at the very least.

Back in the witches' lair however, Nita is poised over her scrying bowl, as Ratih's disembodied head looms from the shadows, pleading for reincarnation. In short order, a spectral black cat is dispatched to Lola's residence, and, we presume, a rather vague form of possession-based inter-generational vengeance is about to be enacted.

The first fruits of this malediction are reaped the following night, via a truly uproarious sequence which transpires after Lola, at the behest of the sleazy, quasi-pimp type guy who seems to control her activities at the nightclub, goes home with a musclebound dude named Randy.

At the height of their passion, during which she spends quite a long time sensually rubbing her face against Randy's knees (which I suppose is as far as local censorship at the time permitted this sort of thing to progress), Lola announces, "now it is time for me to suck your blood!"

After transforming into a vision of Ratih in her purple ceremonial garb, she proceeds to carve a row of bloody gashes into poor Randy's face, before sucking his very life-force (represented by a nifty post-production laser beam) directly from his brain, then plunging her hand into his chest and bloodily eviscerating him. What to say except, wowza.

In view of the unhinged supernatural mayhem I've outlined above, readers may be surprised to learn that, rather than a gory horror movie, 'Cinta Terlarang' seems to have been primarily marketed as an erotic thriller - one of innumerable low budget films which emerged from al points across the globe in the early-to-mid '90s, attempting to ride the slipstream of the wave inaugurated by Paul Verhoeven's 'Basic Instinct'.

And indeed, this is very much the direction the movie takes during its (comparatively) less eventful middle half hour, as a love triangle plotline develops involving the good-hearted Andre, the witch-possessed Lola and… wait for it… chief sorceress Nita herself, who in civilian life turns out to be none other than

We are going to do what we want.

Lola's jealous and possessive lesbian lover! (Which rather begs the question of why Nita allowed her intended life-partner to be transformed into an avenging succubus possessed by the spirit of her decapitated friend, but, well, anyway…)

Wantonly mashing up '80s and '90s aesthetics in a manner reminiscent of the glossy Hong Kong 'erotic action' epics which presumably provided another direct inspiration for the film, 'Cinta Terlarang's director Burnama and DP Herman Susilo employ a hazy, diffused visual style, prioritising blinding blue spotlights are filtered through dry ice and endless expanses of translucent, billowing curtains, and adding plenty of gleaming neon and the best chrome/glass/ silk interiors the production could muster, whilst thumping electro-pop and wistful, Tangerine Dream-esque synth jams fill the soundtrack.

In deference to the diktats of Indonesian state censorship, the film features no actual nudity, but nonetheless, the film's 'erotic' intent is unmistakable. Almost every scene features at least one woman writhing around in some form of outlandishly impractical kinky lingerie, whilst both the ill-fated Randy and a subsequent male victim of Lola/Ratih's wrath also get to strip down to their Y-fronts and perform sweaty (and, in Randy's case, hilarious) sexy dances. (So, props to the filmmakers for a rare concession toward equal opportunities titillation here, I suppose?)

Amidst the lengthy stretches of hysterical/melodramatic relationship talk which accompany the aforementioned love triangle palaver though, Burnama at least has the good sense to keep the cauldron bubbling, as Nita (whilst on witch duty) and Ratih's vengeful head perpetrate further occult outrages. So, that aforementioned pimp guy becomes Lola/Ratih's third victim, before our heroines instigate a spectral assault upon Andre's Dad's house. Sadly though, the latter proves a failure, largely due to the witches' reliance on billowing silk scarves and flying vases as their weapons of choice, both easily repelled by the folksy precautions taken by the father's 'spiritual advisor' guy.

Happily, a number of scenes also continue to incorporate some decently choreographed martial arts-style action, furthering the impression that Burnama may actually have wished he was helming a full scale HK action movie, along the lines of sexed up hits like 'Robotrix' (1991) and 'Naked Killer' (1992) with the sight of Nita laying waste to gangs of machete-wielding goons in slo-mo, silk-flowing wuxia splendour proving particularly edifying.

On this basis, it would be easy to assume that Pitradjaya Burnama was an ambitious young filmmaker, chomping at the bit to introduce exciting, action-

packed new techniques to his nation's oft-parochial movie industry, but a quick crawl through IMDB reveals that this was unlikely to have been the case.

Beginning his career as an actor in the early '60s, Burnama popped up in minor roles in a number of projects which gained international exposure on the action / exploitation circuit, most notably the 1992 Cynthia Rothrock vehicle 'Lady Dragon', as well as purely Indonesian productions such as 1988's 'Jungle Virgin Force' and the 1982 Eva Arnaz / Barry Prima action joint 'Perempuan Bergairah' (which regrettably found itself saddled with a 'comedic' English dub track by those wags at Troma, and released in the U.S. as 'Ferocious Female Freedom Fighters').

Drawing a thread between those movies, you could perhaps make a case for Burnama's acting career giving him a solid background in female-led action cinema, but in fact he had also been directing sporadically since 1971, running the gamut from comedies and melodrama to more promising looking fantasy / action films. As per IMDB at least, 'Cinta Terlarang' is the last of the ten films which bear his name.

Given that none of Burnama's earlier films seem currently obtainable, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the wild, gonzo inventiveness which characterises 'Cinta Terlarang' might be representative of his oeuvre. His penultimate film though, 1993's 'Ranjang Pemikat' ('Demon Queen's Bed'), appears to have been another erotic horror, also starring Sally Marcellina, to which we can assume 'Cinta Terlarang' must be a follow up of sorts.

In fact, Marcellina seems to have become something of an erotic horror star in Indonesia during the early '90s, appearing in a string of other, broadly similar, productions, and - notably, I think - acting as producer and co-writer on several of them (although she is not credited as such on the film under consideration here).

Clearly, we've stumbled on something of a cottage industry here, and clearly there is still a lot of work to be done tracking down some more of Marcellina and/or Burnama's work before I can really speculate on where 'Cinta Terlarang' sits within their respective outputs, or within the era's Indonesian popular cinema more generally.

For the time being though, I'm going to take a more scatter-shot approach and suggest that I *can* see a similar methodology at work here to that guiding the films of my favourite Indonesian director, the venerable H. Tjut Djalil.

Having established his horror credentials beyond question with the all-time Global Weird Cinema landmark 'Mystics in Bali' in 1981, Djalil also seems to have contributed to (or perhaps even instigated?) this '90s Indo-erotic horror

wave with his lasers n' lingerie-filled 'Dangerous Seductress' (1992), but for our purposes here, I would like to turn your attention instead to what is probably his best-loved film in the West, 1989's jaw-dropping action/horror/sex/madness classic 'Lady Terminator'.

When approaching *that* project, the ever-daring Djalil seemed unable (or unwilling) to simply please his investors by making a straight rip-off of 'The Terminator'. Instead, he took the decision to replace the sci-fi elements with an insane, quasi-feminist black magical possession story inspired by the ubiquitous South-East Asian legend of the 'South Sea Queen'. (And also adding tanks, helicopters, supernatural laser blasts and a psychotic fixation with inflicting violence on male genitalia, just because… well, why not?)

By the same token, when it came to making 'Cinta Terlarang', Pitradjaya Burnama seems to have been unable (or unwilling) to make a simple erotic thriller, without spicing it up with… an insane, quasi-feminist black magical possession/revenge story! (And adding gut-ripping laser-enhanced carnage, a sentient severed head and some kung fu, because - well, you get the picture.)

For this excellent creative decision-making, I offer my sincere and humble thanks to Burnama, to Djalil, to their assorted collaborators and enablers, probably to Sally Marcellina too, and to the entire industry and cultural context which briefly made this kind of thing not only possible, but seemingly *obligatory*, as Indonesian exploitation movies struggled to find a niche for themselves in both the domestic and global marketplaces.

At the same time though, the rediscovery of wonderful films like 'Cinta Terlarang' also leads me to reflect sadly on the subsequent trajectory of a nation whose movie theatres and VCRs were once overflowing with kung fu-fighting lesbian witches, implied oral sex, sweaty male strip routines, vampiric flying heads, brain-eating succubi, wild occult rituals and leather-clad Lady Terminators.

Three short decades later, a quick scan through the global news informs me that Indonesians find themselves navigating a socio-political climate in which media portrayals of homosexuality are effectively outlawed, sex outside of marriage has recently been criminalised, and in which women increasingly face harassment for daring to venture outside without full face-covering.

Oh well. As ever, we'll trust that good people and good culture will find a way. But for now? Let's all turn out the lights, cue up VLC, and and return for 80-something minutes to wild and carefree glory days of… 1995? I know, who'd have thought it, right?

A WOMAN'S PRICE DROPS FAST AS THE TIME LIMIT TICKS AWAY!

How could she extend the moments he had given her!

Five minutes to Live

STARRING
JOHNNY CASH
DONALD WOODS
CAY FORESTER
PAMELA MASON

Introducing **Johnny Cash**, America's **top recording star**, as a lusty, romantic, guitar singing powerhouse.

CO-STARRING
MIDGE WARE · VIC TAYBACK · RONNIE HOWARD

Executive Producer LUDLOW FLOWER · Screenplay by CAY FORESTER

Produced by JAMES ELLSWORTH · Directed by BILL KARN · Released by SUTTON PICTURES CORP.

Five Minutes To Live / Door-To-Door Maniac
(Bill Karn, USA, 1961 / 66)

Though opinions vary on the time of death, with some commentators stubbornly insisting on an earlier demise, the mainstream consensus is that the classic era of American Film Noir expired immediately after the release of Orson Welles' appropriately elegiac 'Touch of Evil' in May 1958.

As such, gritty, morally ambiguous monochrome crime films with the poor grace to be released after this date have been shit out of luck, historically speaking; mere stylistic outliers, left floating free in the reference books, as lost and alone as their doomed protagonists, patiently awaiting the official instigation of the more self-aware 'neo-noir' category in the mid-1970s.

Out on the fringes of the movie industry though, various independent producers apparently missed the memo. Further buoyed by the phenomenal success of Hitchcock's low budget, black & white 'Psycho' in 1960, cinematic hustlers and autodidactic auteurs doggedly persisted in knocking out fatalistic, gutter-pulp crime flicks well into the new decade, employing an impoverished, sleazoid aesthetic which frequently cross-pollinated with the new wave of 'roughie' sexploitation films gaining traction in less reputable venues across the USA.

Whilst minimal, hard-boiled New York-based pictures like Allen Baron's 'Blast of Silence' (1960) and Joseph Cates' 'Who Killed Teddy Bear?' (1965) held up the more artistically accomplished end of this post-mortem noir cycle, many prime examples of the more exquisitely fetid brand of 'scum-noir' we're looking at today seem to have been made within literal spitting distance of the Hollywood studio gates.

Witness for example James Landis's 'The Sadist' (1963) or Ray Dennis Steckler's 'The Thrill Killers' (1964), both lensed somewhere in vicinity of L.A.'s suburban sprawl - as indeed was arguably the lowliest of them all, Bill Karn's 'Five Minutes To Live'.

Initially screened under that title in 1961, Karn's film was re-cut with additional footage and re-released five years later as 'Door-To-Door Maniac', achieving precious little success on either occasion.

And, it goes without saying I suppose that the film represents an all-time low ebb in the career of its star, the then 29-year-old Johnny Cash.

Wrestling with chronic substance abuse issues, and making heavy weather of his transition from rockabilly rebel to country icon, it must have felt pretty galling for Cash that, at the exact point his old Sun Records buddy Elvis was livin' it up on Kauai island making 'Blue Hawaii' for Paramount, he instead found himself skulking around some anonymous, pre-fab suburb essaying the role of the titular 'Door-To-Door Maniac', clutching his acoustic guitar like a comfort blanket, and likely receiving little more for his troubles than a a ham sandwich and a few bottles of beer.

Rarely, I'm willing to bet, did life put the Man in Black in such a deep, dark hole, but for the purposes of his fairly extraordinary performance in this movie at least, his exhaustion and anguish was all to the good.

Helpfully narrated in voiceover by prolific film & TV character actor Vic Tayback (of whom more shortly), proceedings begin with some exciting footage of Cash's character - 'Johnny Cabot' - carrying out a "botched warehouse job on the New Jersey waterfront", enthusiastically wielding a tommy gun as he gratuitously mows down a pair of security guards (just to watch them die, presumably).

Now a desperate fugitive from justice, Johnny is next seen hiding out in the featureless no man's land of the So Cal suburbs, "living off his girlfriend" (a ballsy and under-utilised turn from Midge Ware), and scowling through the venetian blinds of her apartment at his uninspiring surroundings.

Before long, Johnny is heading to a bowling alley to make contact with local hood Fred Dorella (the aforementioned Tayback). The meeting is orchestrated by sycophantic alley manager Max, a "small town punk" played to weirdo perfection by ace guitar picker and 'Sixteen Tons' hit-maker Merle Travis.

Between them in fact, Cash, Tayback and Travis present a nigh-on perfect cross-section of flawed mid-century American manhood. Sporting a full complement of cauliflower ears, lop-sided grins, receding chins, chipmunk teeth, bryl-creemed hair, vacant / deranged stares and garish fashion choices, they look as of they could have stepped straight out of an early Daniel Clowes

comic strip. You can almost see the solitary beads of sweat dripping down their foreheads in close-up.

Whatever caper these freaks are planning, it's a cincplan for an ambitious bank job, complete with a 'twist' which I'm sure must date back to the very dawn of pulp crime fiction, although oddly enough, the two cinematic exemplars of it which immediately spring to mind come from British films (Hammer classic 'Cash on Demand' (1960) and Donovan Winter's excruciating 'Give Us Tomorrow' (1978)), as well as the opening act of Peter Fonda/Susan George car chase classic 'Dirty Mary Crazy Larry' (1975).

So, yes - we're basically looking here at the old "wait until the bank manager leaves for work in the morning, take his wife hostage and threaten her over the phone 'til he empties the vault" routine. Dorella is to be the man on the scene in the bank, whilst Johnny, posing as a door-to-door guitar tutor(!?), is charged with inveigling himself into the home of Nancy Wilson (Cay Forester) and holding her at gun-point until Mr Wilson (Donald Woods) coughs up the dough.

As per Dorella's blueprint, these half-bright hooligans will co-ordinate with each other and checking in on progress via phone calls spaced at regular five minute intervals - hence the movie's original title.

Surprisingly, in addition to the obvious financial motivation, Dorella claims a philosophical impetus for his actions, loftily stating that the inspiration for his hackneyed scheme lies in, "proving a theory of mine, one I've had for a long time - about small towns, small living." He doesn't elaborate, but, before long, it becomes clear that screenwriter Cay Forester (yes, the film's script is credited to the female lead) may have been indulging in some similarly deep theorisin'.

"This suburb life ain't for me," is effectively the first line of dialogue Johnny Cash snarls in the 'Five Minutes To Live' cut of the film, and the dichotomy between the placid, predictable façade of middle class life and the parallel (implicitly urban) world of the wild-eyed criminal psychotics who lurk upon its fringes is reinforced throughout.

This theme is hammered home with almost comical emphasis as Tayback and Cash quite literally *lurk* on the corner opposite the Wilson home, their shabby clothes (straw hat for Vic, three-piece undertaker's suit for Johnny) and jittery mannerisms instantly marking them out as outsiders; tourists from another realm of existence, who might as well have clawed their way out of the grave to spy on the wholesome residents of Clean Living, U.S.A.

As Dorella counts off the minutes on his watch, noting the routine steps in the Wilsons' morning routine, Johnny seems genuinely taken aback by the realisation that some people do the same things, at the same time, each working day.

"You mean everybody around here eats and sleeps by a *clock*?!" he exclaims, the contrast with the impulsive, hand-to-mouth chaos of his own existence strongly implied; "I never saw so much of NOTHING in my life!"

Twenty-five years before 'Blue Velvet', the moral metaphysics of the Lynchian universe can be found here, fully laid out in skeletal form - and, curiously, Karn and Forester's sympathies seem to lie more squarely with the crazy/criminal element than Lynch's ever did.

This is made clear as soon as our focus shifts inside the Wilson household, where - and hey, I bet you didn't see *this* coming - it turns out that the idyllic surface of suburban life hides a world of hypocrisy, shame and dysfunction.

For starters, Nancy Wilson is so preoccupied with complications arising from her requirement to deliver a speech to the local "women's club" that all she can be bothered to serve up to her hungry husband and young son for breakfast are unappetising bowls of non-descript "mush".

This being 1961 of course, the possibility that Mr Wilson may want to take the initiative and whip up something more palatable for his family to eat is never raised, but regardless - Nancy's husband has other things on his mind, not least a debilitating hangover, apparently acquired in the presence of persons other than his wife.

We gather that he is struggling to make some kind of difficult and important announcement to Nancy… but his attempts are derailed when it emerges that she has nominated him against his will as president of the local PTA, prompting him to announce that he's late for work and get the hell outta there, leaving his mush untouched.

For Little Jimmy Wilson (played by none other than a seven-year-old Ron Howard!) meanwhile, this ill-starred morning is already a catastrophic write-off. Not only has a maternal promise of "hotcakes" been cruelly ignored, but Mum and Dad can't even find the wherewithal to buy him a new baseball uniform in time for the big game! What manner of lame-ass parenting is *this*, we're invited to ask, as our uncomfortable sojourn in the Wilson breakfast nook is characterised by much aggro, and zero love.

Given that Forester takes sole credit for the movie's script, it's surprising how negatively her character is portrayed here, with the lion's share of responsibility for her family's dysfunction seen as resulting directly from her failings as a wife and mother. In fact, a certain degree of masochism seems to inform the treatment of Nancy throughout the film, beginning with her very first appearance, when Johnny - casing her from across the street - declares, "she might live like a magazine ad, but she don't look like one - she is a *mess*."

And, speaking of a mess - you remember that important announcement Mr Wilson was attempting to make to his wife? Well, the nature of its contents soon become clear when he stops off on his way to work to visit his mistress (an older, rather prim woman, played with excruciating amateurishness by Pamela Mason), who berates him for failing to summon up the courage to ask Nancy for a divorce, thus delaying their plans to elope to Las Vegas and live it up in proper adulterous style, ASAP.

So, based on the assumption that Ken Wilson (like everybody else in this movie) possesses the moral fibre of a woodlouse, this revelation rather puts the kibosh on Fred Dorella's grand heist plan, dontcha think..?

But, it's too late to turn back now, and a pall of doom hangs over Johnny as he slopes up the driveway to Mrs Wilson's door, guitar case in hand… which brings us, finally, to the most infamous element of 'Door-To-Door Maniac' / 'Five Minutes To Live'- Johnny Cash's, shall we say, *singular* performance style, as he acts out a violent household invasion scenario alongside the overwrought/terrified Cay Forester.

In fairness to Johnny, up to this point in the movie, he's done ok, acting-wise, shooting glib lines back and forth with seasoned pro Vic Tayback, and generally scowling like a bad 'un. But once he rings that doorbell and he has to carry the whole show himself, all bets are off.

What we're seeing here, essentially, is a novice actor cut off from all support and left to flounder. Reportedly receiving zero direction from the disengaged Karn, and likely not finding much to work with in the script either, Cash's performance during these scenes is reminiscent of a second rate comedian desperately trying to fill dead airtime in a live TV broadcast that's gone horribly wrong.

A world away from the confidently grizzled, outlaw persona he would develop on-stage in subsequent decades, the Cash we get here seems young, vulnerable and genuinely slightly unhinged, perhaps with a touch of speed-freak raw nerves showing through.

Trying to recount Cash's conduct once ensconced within the Wilson home, it's difficult really to know where to begin. His insistence on casually picking out tunes on his guitar whilst glowering menacingly at his hostage? The moment when he attempts to threaten her by making weird, 'jazz hands' gestures, like a carnie conjurer? Or, perhaps most alarmingly, the sequence in which he takes a poker from the fireplace and begins frenziedly smashing the chintzy china ornaments which litter the set?

(In a movie littered with glimpses of socio-cultural despair, perhaps the single saddest moment comes when Nancy exclaims that she's "saved up for a year" to buy one of the tasteless pieces of ceramic crap which Johnny has just thoughtlessly whacked.)

As a result of all this, the movie's central captor/captive relationship takes on a surreal, discombobulated feel which proves far more unsettling than would have been the case were Forester merely faced with a professional actor portraying a dangerous psychopath.

Given that Johnny neglects to fill her in on the details of the bank heist scheme, Nancy is left entirely in the dark as to why this funereally-garbed rockabilly eccentric has invaded her home and is now forcing her at gunpoint to listen to him playing variations on 'The Wabash Cannonball'. And for us as viewers meanwhile, Johnny's off-piste, semi-improvised antics disrupt the logic of the movie's crudely delineated 'suspense' narrative, reminding me, once again, of the inexplicable encounters with denizens of the underworld later found in the work of David Lynch.

It is here also that the differences between the two versions of the film really come into play. In the earlier 'Five Minutes To Live', the 'home invasion' scenes are flatly directed in routine 'sit-com' style, largely confined to long-shot and failing to really convey much sense of a psycho-sexual dynamic between the two characters.

Five years later though, whoever edited 'Door-To-Door Maniac' seems to have made a concerted effort to "amp up" these sequences, using insert shots

of hands and torsos to suggest greater physical contact between Cash and Forester, and - in a technique common to many low budget films of the period - attempting to emphasise the emotional turmoil of the situation using disorientating, out-of-focus close-ups of the actors' faces, crying, gurning or generally freaking out in a manner which repeatedly fails to match their behaviour in the wider shots.

Quite how the '66 re-do of the film managed to obtain this additional footage of the principal actors, god only knows. (Were these outtakes? Zoomed in details from wider shots with an overdubbed soundtrack? Or were they just excised from the original cut for being too weird?) Whatever the case though, these 'caveman Cassavetes' interjections of accidental avant-gardism add a real mad spark to proceedings, dovetailing nicely with the unpredictability of Cash's performance.

In the '61 cut, Nancy Wilson responds to Johnny's unprecedented assault upon her daily routine simply with cringing terror and confusion, but the '66 cut, weirdly, creates an impression of her taking more agency over her situation, playing games with her unhinged captor in the time-honoured manner, as the additional close-ups see Cay Forester pitching her performance at the very edge of hysteria.

This all culminates in probably my favourite moment in the film, when Johnny pushes Nancy into the bedroom, anticipating some not-quite-consensual sexual activity. Temporarily reverting back to a devoted housewife, she begins instinctively tidying up the sheets, prompting Johnny to growl a line previously unuttered in human history, "leave it alone - *I like a messy bed*."

Just superb. What an absolute *creep*! As I think has been demonstrated above, the dialogue in Forester's screenplay is occasionally quite inspired, but nothing beats that.

Shortly thereafter, additional hand / body insert shots are used to strengthen the implication of a sexual assault taking place during Cash and Forester's bedroom struggle (classy), which feels like a good moment to clarify that, in case this hasn't already been made clear, 'Door-To-Door Maniac' / 'Five Minutes to Live' is not, in any objective or technical sense, a good film.

With the notable exception of Tayback, performances are grating, awkward and wildly inappropriate across the board, suggesting that Cash was not alone in suffering as a result of Karn's directorial disinterest. Visually meanwhile, with the exception of the opening machine gun massacre and the wild '66 insert footage, the majority of the film is shot in flat, '50s TV style, displaying minimal concern for framing or composition as the sluggish camera simply pans horizontally, begrudgingly following the actors around the set.

It's easy to see why 'Five Minutes to Live' sank like a stone in '61, especially given that, copping out on the hints of noir freakery in Forester's script, it ultimately opts for a desultory, Hollywood-conventional ending, dead as a rain-soaked firework.

Clearly aware of the need to address this deficiency, the people behind the 'Door-To-Door Maniac' re-edit attempted some major surgery on the final ten minutes. As a result, things become choppy in the extreme, as chunks of discontinuous footage are jammed together, dragging the viewer through a confusing emotional whirlwind, culminating in an attempt to assemble a new - decidedly sleazier - ending from editing room scraps. Though jaw-droppingly amateurish in execution, this tinkering concludes the film on a disquieting, flat-out *weird* note which must be seen to be believed, inadvertently enhancing its appeal as a piece of oddball/cult cinema in the process.

Even in terms of its soundtrack, the '66 cut proves rougher and stranger than the '61. Featured in both versions, Cash's title song for 'Five Minutes To Live' is a decent example of his craft. Elevated by some fine guitar-work from Merle Travis, it has turned up on compilations and 'greatest hits' discs over the years, despite seeming not to have been pressed as a single at the time.

The other number recorded for the film however, 'I've Come To Kill', is a real hot mess. Wisely left out of the 'Five Minutes..' cut entirely, but placed up front in 'Door-To-Door Maniac', it mirrors Cash's performance in the movie itself, sounding as if it was improvised at gun-point whilst Johnny was crashing at the end of a particularly savage speed binge. Somewhat adjacent to the Eddie Noack tradition of morbid psycho-country songs, it's lost fragment of deep American weirdness, and not necessarily in a good way… which, actually, could serve as a pretty good epitaph for the film as a whole, now that I think about it.

Understandably, 'Door-To-Door Maniac' / 'Five Minutes To Live' seems to have become a profound source of embarrassment for Johnny Cash - reflected in the fact that, despite the commanding charisma he increasingly brought to his stage performances and TV appearances, it would be a full decade before he again dared to undertake a fictional acting role, and even after that, he largely restricted himself to semi-autobiographical TV guest spots.

Likewise, the film seems to have marked the end of the line (vis-à-vis the film industry at least) for its other creative principals. Having come up via episodic TV in the '50s, Bill Karn made this his final gig, one of only two independent features he directed. The film's script was Cay Forrester's sole writing credit, and, over a decade after she made a promising start playing small roles in legit Hollywood fare (most notably in the 1949 noir classic 'D.O.A.'), it proved to be her last significant acting role too.

For all that the cracked movie this trio made together proved to be a cultural dead-end though, still it lives on - valuable not only as the target of derision, but, I would contest, as both an inarticulate assault on '50s conformist culture and as a prime exemplar of its era's beneath-the-water-line scum-noir aesthetic, forever lurking in the cinematic undergrowth, ready to tempt anyone who ever feels like taking a chance on a public domain psycho-thriller starring Johnny Cash and Richie from 'Happy Days'.

IT COULD BE YOUR STREET...
YOUR HOUSE...YOUR LIFE!
WHEN THE BELL RINGS...
DON'T ANSWER!
IT COULD BE THE
DOOR-TO-DOOR
MANIAC!
JOHNNY CASH · DONALD WOODS · CAY FORESTER
PAMELA MASON · RONNIE HOWARD Young Star of "The Magic Man"
Executive Producer LUDLOW FLOWER · Produced by JAMES ELLSWORTH · Directed by BILL KARN

CONTEMPO-KAIDAN SAMPLER

In recent years, releases such as Radiance Films' 'Daei Gothic' box sets and Arrow's collection of Daei's '60s Yokai Monsters movies have helped expand the range of vintage Japanese ghost / horror films legitimately available to English speakers beyond the over-familiar shortlist of art-house-approved classics - but still, they barely skim the surface of this fascinating and oft-overlooked area of cinema.

As such, I initially thought it might be fun to put together an overview of lesser known '50s-'60s *kaidan* titles for this zine. In the process of going through potential films to cover though, it occurred to me that most of my favourite entries in this cycle are actually those which depart from the long-established conventions of historical / folkloric ghost stories, instead taking place in a contemporary setting.

Often throwing elements borrowed from western horror and/or wider Japanese pop culture into the mix, this sub-set of films take a liminal, 'anything goes' approach to the genre, marking a total break from the formal, strictly proscribed narratives of the historical *kaidan*, arguably positioning them as a kind of spookier parallel to the internationally-minded 'borderless action' style of crime films produced by Nikkatsu studios during the same era, and *definitely* making them a whole lot of fun - which is the main criteria for their inclusion here.

Readers should note that I've excluded two key examples of the form from the survey below - Hajime Satô's demented gothic fever dream 'The Ghost of the Hunchback' aka 'House of Terrors' (1965), and Noriaki Yuasa's Kazuo Umezu adaptation 'The Snake Girl & The Silver-Haired Witch' (1968). These are not covered below simply on the basis that they have already received English-friendly blu-ray releases (from Arrow and Mondo Macabro respectively), and can thus be easily obtained or read about. Both are excellent movies however, and would make a great introductions to this curious and oft-outrageous corner of the cinematic landscape. For those who'd care to dig a little deeper though - welcome to CONTEMPO-KAIDAN SAMPLER.

The Vampire Moth ['Kyûketsu-ga']
(Nobuo Nakagawa, 1956)

More than any of Japan's other film studios, the marginal Shintoho seem to have embraced the potential of tackling fantastical / horror subject matter during the late 1950s, primarily via the work of one of the studio's most prolific and talented directors, Nobuo Nakagawa.

In the West, Nakagawa is probably best-known for his metaphysical atrocity epic 'Jigoku' ('Hell', 1960), a production of which infamously played a significant role in driving Shintoho into bankruptcy, and to a lesser extent for his sombre take on the ubiquitous 'Yotsuya Kaidan' (1958).

For my money though, Nakagawa's most enjoyable films in the genre were actually the series of lower budget black & white pictures which preceded these more ambitious efforts - beginning with this absolute doozy, produced for *actual* Toho in 1956, prior to the director's defection to off-shoot Shintoho.

So, to begin with the bad news - 'Kyûketsu-ga' [literal translation: 'Vampire Moth'] features no vampire moth. Not even a hint of one. Nada. Once we've all recovered from that disappointment though, we can hopefully appreciate the film as a wonderfully lurid, richly atmospheric proto-*giallo* shocker, concerning models employed by a high-class fashion-house being menaced and murdered by a gloved, trenchcoat-clad assassin.

The presumed perpetrator of these crimes is an unsavoury character referred to in dialogue as a 'wolf man' on account of his deformed jaw and chiselled, pointed teeth (he basically looks like an orc). This 'wolf man' seems to be in cahoots with a reclusive lepidopterist and disgraced former fashion designer who lives in a spooky stone mansion filled with display cases containing

thousands of rare moths, wherein he sits around composing threatening letters to the fashion-house's employees.

On this basis, you may question why the folks at the fashion-house don't simply advise the cops to head over and apprehend these eminently suspicious ne'erdowells - but, life for the protagonists of mystery fiction is rarely quite that simple, is it?

Certainly not if they're unlucky enough to find themselves in this movie, that's for sure, as this seemingly cut-and-dried case of 'disgruntled former employee'-type vengeance soon becomes so intractably complicated that it requires the intervention of popular Japanese series detective Kôsuke Kindaichi (stoically played on this occasion by Ryô Ikebe) to get to bottom of things.

A hugely enjoyable, noir-tinged mystery/horror, 'Vampire Moth' employs superb, deep focus black & white photography to create a rich, pulpy atmosphere, a delivers a wealth of splendidly eerie 'shock' sequences. Presumably taking full advantage of Toho's production resources, Nakagawa's camera is ever mobile, elegantly gliding through a range of impressively vast, architecturally striking sets and locations, all accompanied by an especially arresting example of dissonant, kaidan-style musical scoring, featuring a woozy central melody played on what sounds like a singing saw.

And, as fans of Italian horror will be practically screaming by this point - yes, 'Vampire Moth' does indeed stand as an unmistakeable, albeit accidental, precursor to the *giallo* thrillers of the '60s / '70s, pre-empting that genre's key signifiers to a fairly extraordinary extent, even down to the baroque production design, risqué scenes of morbid eroticism and use of insect/animal imagery - all combined as the naked bodies of the murdered models discovered with rare butterflies pinned to their breasts; pretty strong stuff for 1956, in any corner of the globe.

In fact, the scenario and set-pieces here are so reminiscent of Mario Bava's epochal 'Blood & Black Lace' (1964), you'd swear Bava must have taken a few notes from 'Vampire Moth', were it not for the borderline impossibility of his having seen Nakagawa's film, given that (to my knowledge) it has never been legally screened or distributed outside of Japan - an oversight which we can only hope will one day be corrected, given how captivating and unusual it remains to this day.

The Lady Vampire ['Onna Kyûketsuki']
(Nobuo Nakagawa, 1959)

The same sentiments apply equally to another determinedly strange addition to the Japanese horror canon which Nakagawa, now ensconced at Shintoho, directed three years later - 'Onna Kyûketsuki' ['The Lady Vampire'].

Mixing a mangled take on western monster-lore with a touch of the refined atmosphere and outlandish imagery of Edogawa Rampo's mystery fiction, this is a loopy little number that, to my delight, totally refuses to adhere to the rules of any particular horror sub-genre, or indeed any kind of conventional narrative formula whatsoever.

The strange tale begins when the birthday party of Itsuko (Junko Ikeuchi), a wealthy young heiress in contemporary Tokyo, is interrupted by the arrival of a dishevelled, hag-like figure, who, it soon transpires, is actually Itsuko's mother, last seen twenty years previously when she mysteriously disappeared whilst visiting Kyushu *[Japan's rural southern island]*. Once she has been cleaned up and has started to recuperate furthermore, it becomes clear that the mother (played by Yôko Mihara - later a fixture in Toei's action/exploitation movies) has *not aged at all* in the intervening years.

In an attempt to take her mind off this perplexing turn of events, Itsuko accompanies her hip journalist boyfriend on a visit to the 'Ueno International Arts Expo' - only for the couple to discover that the winner of the festival's jury prize is a painting featuring an exact likeness of the prodigal mother, depicted as a reclining nude!

As if this weren't weird enough, the artwork in question is subsequently stolen in a nocturnal raid carried out by a wild-haired, capering dwarf, who delivers it directly to his 'master' - a tall, suave gentleman in a trilby, mirror shades and white driving gloves, played in

characteristically sinister fashion by 'depraved samurai' specialist Shigeru Amachi. Subsequently, the painting is anonymously delivered to the home of Itsuko's (extremely confused) family.

All of which starts to make at least *some* sense once we learn that Amachi's character is not only the artist responsible for painting Itsuko's mother's likeness, but is also a vampire, whose hypnotic wiles lured her away from her family down in Kyushu all those years ago.

Suffice to say however, Amachi is no ordinary romantically-inclined bloodsucker, and western horror fans are liable to find themselves experiencing a sense of cognitive dissonance as we see him freaking out in his hotel room, bloodily cannibalising a passing maid as he undergoes an involuntary transformation into a slavering, clawed and fanged beast, raving all the while about "..the dreadful moonlight".

Yes folks, whether by accident or design, Nakagawa & co appear to have gotten their 'vampire' and 'werewolf' rulebooks all mixed up here - but regardless, the havoc wreaked by this were-vampire as he rips a bloody swathe through downtown Ueno proves hair-raising stuff, to say the least.

Meanwhile, back in Itsuko's family home, things get even stranger, as her uptight father decides it's "revealing the family secret" time, lamenting his clan's "cursed blood", and cueing us into an extended flashback sequence whose confusing web of familial revelations takes us all the way back to the Shimbara Rebellion of 1638, and the fate of real-life Christian martyr Shiro Amakusa - who, in this film's mythos, also turns out to have been a vampire, having presumably been 'infected' by western missionary types.

A ubiquitous figure in Japanese folklore and pop culture, one could easily spend a lifetime unpacking the sinister/supernatural reputation which has accumulated around Amakusa since his execution at the hands of the Shogunate… but all this is whizzed through in double-quick time in 'The Lady Vampire', leaving us *gaijin* viewers thoroughly bewildered, as the film hustles us directly on to our heroes' climactic confrontation with this apparently Christian vampire(?!) in his cavernous island lair.

Here, we learn that Amachi's retinue of subservient spooks includes not only his aforementioned dwarf servant, but also a scary Bakeneko *[Ghost Cat]* lady (perhaps re-using the make-up created for Nakagawa's 'Ghost Cat Mansion' (1958)?), and

Shigeru Amachi, about to freak out in 'The Lady Vampire'.

some guy who looks like a cross between a muscle-bound caveman and a Shaolin monk, and wields a kind of primitive musket. (Evidently I'm lacking the necessary cultural context to identify this latter figure, so - answers on a postcard, I guess.)

For its truly bizarre, 'everything but the kitchen sink' plotting alone, 'The Lady Vampire' would stand as essential viewing for fans of weird global horror cinema, but with Nakagawa at the helm, it's an accomplished piece of filmmaking too.

Cramming a wealth of unhinged set-pieces, outlandish characters and eerie locations into its 80-minute run-time, the film's tone swings wildly between elegant, romantic mystery, full-blooded horror, doom-laden historical reverie and matinee monster-bashing, feeling like the work of a director practically blasting disparate ideas out of a blunderbuss to try to get them all on-screen before the obligation to move onto another, more mundane, assignment intervenes.

Girl Divers of Spook Mansion ['Ama no Bakemono Yashiki']
(Morihei Magatani, 1959)

Amidst the flurry of low budget horror films made by Shintoho in the late 1950s, one of the more curious off-shoots resulted from the studio's decision to cross-fertilise their enthusiasm for spooky subject matter with their parallel interest in making films about the famed female 'Ama' divers of Japan's remote coastal communities, who for centuries have descended into the depths to harvest pearls and other aquatic valuables, whilst traditionally wearing little more than skimpy loincloths.

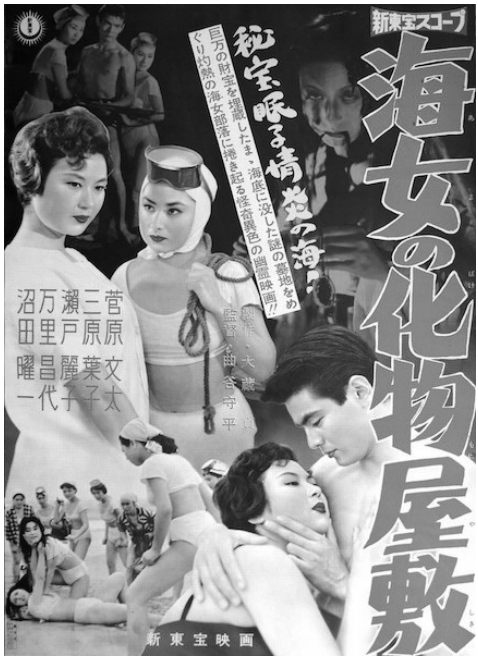
In reality of course, Ama divers have

generally tended to be hardy, older women, more physically attuned to the rigours of open water diving in a cold climate. But nonetheless, the prospect of using a highly fanciful version of the Ama lifestyle - complete with narratively justifiable semi-nudity - to sell cinema tickets to Japan's predominantly male, urban audiences was clearly a no-brainer for Shintoho's execs.

Of course, state-imposed censorship remained a significant concern during the 1950s, and by the time these films reached the screen, the photogenic young models and actresses inevitably cast as the divers found themselves more demurely clad in halter tops, bonnets and big white bloomers - raising the question of exactly what kind of stories could actually be told about these plucky maidens of the deep, in the absence of any more overtly sexual / exploitative content.

Ghost stories, apparently, provided the answer. Which brings us to 'Girl Divers of Spook Mansion' - the first in a brief series of cross-over flicks which also included 'Ghost of the Girl Diver' and the delightfully transliterated 'Girl Diver Trembles in Fear' (both 1960).

The storyline here concerns the travails of a young woman named Kyoko (Yôko Mihara again!), who



travels to an Ama community from Tokyo, having received a worrying letter from her friend Waka (Kuniko Yamamura).

Waka appears to live alone in a gigantic, Western-style mansion filled with an entire museum's-worth of dusty statuary and antique knick-knacks. As is standard in such situations, she is waited upon by both a cackling hunchback and a sinister, stink-eye dispensing housekeeper who is often seen petting a black cat (rarely a good omen in this kind of movie).

Unfortunately, the absence of sub-titles prevented me from entirely comprehending the finer details of

the plot here, but I *think* Waka believes she is being haunted by the ghost of her missing sister, who was last seen running into the ocean waves after her husband was reported lost at sea?

Whatever the case though, a wealth of spooky imagery, atmospheric shadows and hypnotic crashing of waves ensues, along with a some truly exceptional jump scares, orchestrated with a degree of finesse which would put most 21st century horror directors to shame.

Meanwhile, a very different kind of action unfolds down on the beach, as rival gangs of female divers face off against each other, much in the same manner as the 'Pinky Violence' movies Mihara would appear in for Toei over a decade later. One faction is led by Reiko Seto, whose hard-boiled attitude and venomous stare could certainly have passed muster on the mean streets of '70s Shinjuku, whilst the audience is also treated to… well, let's just say a whole lot of *transparency*, as the divers emerge from the ocean after a hard day's work.

Disappointingly for those of us more interested in the film's horror elements, it is eventually revealed that the haunting at Waka's mansion is a fraud, perpetrated in classic 'Scooby Doo' fashion by a cabal of eccentric villains (including a corrupt, kimono-clad local politician and a lecherous, cigar-chomping phony marine biologist), seeking to steal the much-rumoured family treasure.

Said treasure, it transpires, is actually hidden in a cave only accessible through an underwater passage, which neatly serves to tie up the diver plotline with the mystery story, and… well, you can probably see where all this is headed. The climactic brawl in the shadowy, snake-infested cavern still proves a lot of fun though, including a welcome appearance by future yakuza movie icon Bunta Sugawara, playing Kyoko's cop boyfriend.

(Could Bunta-san's presence here have been intended to provide 'a little something for the ladies' *[or, by extension, thus-inclined gents in the audience]*, given that he spends most of his screen time strutting around in a pair of Tarzan-style trunks stolen from a small child? Who can say.)

Whilst I wouldn't class this one as a 'must see', it certainly represents a curious cul-de-sac in the history of Japanese commercial cinema, and offers a lot more in terms of entertainment value than simply the pleasure of being able to cross 'Girl Divers of Spook Mansion' off my TO WATCH list after seeing that

extraordinary title listed in several reference works.

The Woman from The Sea ['Kaitei Kara Kita Onna'] (Koreyoshi Kurahara, 1959)

Staying with women, and with the sea…. as far as I'm aware, the cosmopolitan Nikkatsu studio pretty much *never* dabbled with fantastical subject matter during their '50s / '60s hey-day, but one notable exception to the rule is this beguiling one-off, scripted by the architect of the studio's popular 'Sun Tribe' youth films (and future mayor of Tokyo) Shintarô Ishihara, and directed by the man who would soon go on to become one of Nikkatsu's wildest directors, Koreyoshi Kurahara.

Perhaps the closest Japanese cinema came to echoing the low-key approach to horror pioneered by Val Lewton's RKO productions of the 1940s - though with an uneasy sense of levity subbing for Lewton's preferred doom-laden atmos - 'The Woman From The Sea' takes place in an idyllic coastal retreat where idle rich kids wile away their summer holidays, much in the manner of the aforementioned 'Sun Tribe' movies.

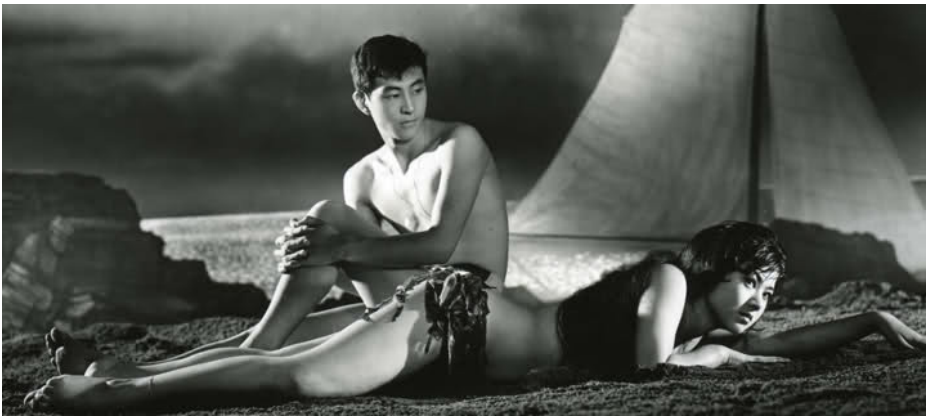
Amongst these youngsters, we find Toshio (Tamio Kawachi), a quiet and introverted lad who rejects the empty hedonism of his peers, instead dedicating his time to strumming his ukulele, staring wistfully out to sea and pottering about in his modestly equipped fishing boat.

The first inklings of anything untoward intruding upon Toshio's quiet life occur when his only sort-of friend, an unhinged beatnik poet guy, accosts him, babbling about an apparition of a ghostly woman trying to lure him, siren-like, into the ocean. Meanwhile, down at the harbour, the surly local fishermen are up in arms about the fact some 'maniac' has destroyed their traps, ruining their overnight catch.

Although Toshio shrugs off these bad omens, it is more difficult for him to ignore the sight which greets him as he slouches down to his boat the next morning - a voluptuous, muscular young woman (Hisako Tsukuba) reclining on deck, clad in a skimpy, makeshift swimsuit, bloodily devouring a raw fish.

As you might imagine, Toshio's bewilderment only increases as the woman informs him that she caught the fish with her bare hands, that she swam to the harbour from her home 'nearby', where she lives alone, sustaining herself solely via food caught from the ocean.

As they talk more, it becomes clear that Toshio's new acquaintance has



Tamio Kawachi and Hisako Tsukuba in a publicity still for 'The Woman from The Sea'.

taken a bit of a shine to him, perhaps appreciating the gentle earnestness which sets him apart from his land-dwelling peers.

Following their first meeting, the woman begins making nocturnal visits to Toshio's cliff-top home, clambering up the rocks and sneaking through his bedroom window. Naturally enough, one thing leads to another, and before long Toshio finds himself wondering how he's going to explain to people that his new girlfriend is a nameless, half-naked amazon who seemingly swam ashore from parts unknown.

Meanwhile, more fish-stock has been slaughtered, and boats have been damaged. Sightings of a large, predatory shark have been reported, and a fisherman has gone missing.

We learn that, twenty years previously, the men of the village hunted down and killed a giant shark which had been plaguing the harbour. It was rumoured that this particular shark had the power to take on human form, and that it had seduced a human woman, spiriting her away to the sea, from whence she has never returned, and…. well you can probably see where this is all headed once the superstitious locals catch a glimpse of Toshio promenading with his mysterious new romantic partner.

Much like Curtis Harrington's thematically similar 'Night Tide' (1961), 'The Woman From The Sea' presents a determinedly ambiguous take on its subject matter, down-playing the story's supernatural aspects and focusing instead on the ontological uncertainties with which the previously apathetic Toshio is

suddenly confronted, as he tries to square the reality of the flesh-and-blood woman before him with the wild and repulsive folkloric identity assigned to her by the villagers.

Though the film remains non-committal re: the woman's true nature, neither does it really offer any alternative to the villagers' supernatural hypothesis, leaving us with little choice but to assume the worst.

All the same though, Tsukuba's shark-woman remains a very sympathetic figure, irrespective of the destruction she may have wrought. Her concerns are simple, and she acts impulsively - like a proud animal spirit, just going about her business.

Certainly, she shows no sign of embodying any of the evil desires which the villagers project upon her. In all likelihood, she has simply returned to the harbour for much the same reasons a normal shark would - to find food and warm water, rather than to pursue any agenda of ghostly vengeance. And, her affection for Toshio is clearly genuine too – a source of companionship, connecting her to her former human self, rather than some attempt to lure him to his doom.

Despite these metaphysical quandaries though, it is worth stressing that, unlike 'Night Tide', 'Cat People' or any of the other movies in this general category, 'The Woman From The Sea' is also *very funny*. Always an idiosyncratic director, Kurahara defies genre convention by wringing some great comedy moments from the mis-match between the feckless Toshio and his brazen, larger-than-life partner, and from the consternation with which their strange relationship is greeted by the film's other characters.

Indeed, in stark contrast to the Lewton model, Kurahara gives the drama here a breezy, matter of fact kind of feel, investing the script's weird events, not with baleful darkness, but with a kind of day-dreamy surrealism, rarely resorting to melodrama or explicit displays of emotion, and juxtaposing laughter, poignancy and unease in a way which twists up the viewer's own emotions something rotten.

Witness for instance the sight of Toshio earnestly practicing his ukulele after learning that his brother has apparently died in a boating accident, tears running down his cheeks as he incongruously whistles a jaunty, Hawaiian melody; or the almost apologetic tone taken by the angry mob who turn up at his door to inform him that his girlfriend is a shape-shifting shark

monster, their embarrassed buffoonery undercutting the savage violence of their purpose.

A strange, touching and genuinely unusual little film, 'The Woman From The Sea' has never been released on disc in English-speaking territories, but it has occasionally turned up on touring programmes of Nikkatsu movies and sub-titled TV broadcasts - look out for it.

The Living Skeleton ['Kyûketsu Dokuro-sen'] (Hiroshi Matsuno, 1968)

Following the late '50s boom in Japanese horror which produced the films discussed above, interest in the genre seemed to fade, before peaking again - for reasons which remain entirely obscure to me - in 1968.

Although the bulk of that year's bumper crop comprised period-set *kaidan* and yokai films produced by the traditionally-minded Daei studio, these were accompanied by a small number of genuinely extraordinary, contemporary-set movies produced by the normally genre-averse Shochiku.

Helpfully collected by Criterion on a long out-of-print DVD set in 2012, Shochiku's class of '68 included such SF-horror mind-melters as Hajime Satô's 'Goke: Bodysnatcher From Hell' and Kazui Nihonmatsu's alarmingly titled 'Genocide' - but my personal favourite, and the one which best fits our purposes here, is 'The Living Skeleton' [or, to attempt a direct translation of the Japanese title, 'The Bloodsucking Skull'], a richly textured exercise in oneiric weirdness which I described in an earlier review as "..a delirious mixture of '60s gothic, ghoulish mad science, psychic turbulence and macabre aquatic psychedelia".

Although this is the very much the kind of horror movie in which narrative takes a back seat to atmos and imagery, the basic outline of film's script is sufficiently unusual to make it worth recounting at least in brief - not least due to the fact that the drama actually begins far away from the gothic realm, with a harrowing, jarringly edited sequence in which the passengers aboard a coastal ferry (the 'Dragon King') are brutally massacred by a cabal of blood-thirsty pirates.

Mod-ishly directed by Matsuno, one memorable shot here features the reflection of a terrified woman, replicated in both eye-pieces of a pair of mirror-shades worn by one of the attackers - an image directly replicated later in the film, via a shot depicting two identically posed dancers picked out by individual spot-lights during a nightclub sequence. This uncanny mirroring

actually plays directly into the film's plot too, as our protagonist Saeko, a survivor of the aforementioned massacre (played with icy, Barbara Steele-esque splendour by Kikko Matsuoka) feels herself haunted by the spirit of her twin sister, who died (or did she?) at hands of the pirates.

By day, Saeko helps out at a cliff-top Christian shrine whose pastor has granted her refuge, and is courted by happy-go-lucky delivery boy. Once night falls though, she is drawn back to the sight of her trauma, as the bats-on-strings come out and the disembodied voice of her lost sister calls from afar. As is customary, long walks are taken through shadowed corridors with the obligatory guttering candelabra, as the sinister hulk of the empty 'Dragon King' drifts by, somewhere out on the ocean…

Meanwhile, things take a rather Jess Franco-ish turn, as assorted scoundrels who profited from the proceeds of the Dragon King massacre find themselves menaced, stalked and murdered by a shadowy female assailant who (you guessed it) looks quite a bit like Saeko.

A definitive exemplar of that micro-genre of horror films whose stories unfold in the liminal space between land and sea (cf: 'The She Creature', 'Night Tide', 'The Fog'), 'The Living Skeleton's plot-line soon fragments into deliberately cultivated abstraction, as the filmmakers focus instead on delivering a succession of startling, quasi-surreal images destined to live long in the viewer's memory - from the dangling, spectral skeletons which torment Saeko and her boyfriend during a scuba diving expedition, to the metaphorical hellscape of the 'Dragon King's interior, literally dripping with the blood and gore of slaughtered innocents and presided over by the deranged, cadaverous figure of Japanese horror mainstay Kô Nishimura.

Pre-empting the kind of full spectrum delirium usually associated with '70s Euro-horror, 'The Living Skeleton' consciously evokes the feel of a nightmare, as dream blurs with reality, past blurs with present, and as multiple iterations of characters phase in and out of view, never quite living, never quite dead.

An audacious amalgam of Western and Eastern gothic tropes, Matsuno's film delivers one of the most concentrated doses of pitch-black spookery found in the annals of Nippon-eiga, and fans of such things who remain unfamiliar with its charms should make a point of rectifying that ASAP.

Mod-gothic style in ‘The Living Skeleton’.

CineChat # 4: Cynthia Rothrock

In recent years, many films starring Martial Arts World Champion, 8th Dan Grand Master and '80s/'90s action movie legend Cynthia Rothrock have been restored and released in swanky blu-ray editions. Naturally, B & S of CineChat have systematically bought and watched them all, and share their thoughts below. [TLDR version: Cynthia Rothrock is awesome, but the films she appeared in were not always awesome.]

[Previous editions of CineChat appeared in ***Alternative Strategies*** *(https://anothersubculture.co.uk/) &* ***Twisted Nerve*** *zines.]*

B: So - Cynthia Rothrock. What are your general feelings?
S: Well, she's the best!
B: Yeah.
S: But actually, I didn't know much about her until, like, 10 years ago, as I didn't watch a lot of action movies when I was young in Japan. I always loved Hong Kong movies with Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao etc, but I never watched the ones with Cynthia Rothrock…
B: Well, I guess she was only in a fairly small number of HK movies, and I'm assuming people in Japan probably didn't bother importing her direct-to-video American movies, so…
S: Yeah, maybe.

B: So, let's begin with her Hong Kong movies - which one do you think is the best?
S: Hmm that's a difficult question but I think it'd probably be the one with Yuen Biao…
B: Righting Wrongs (*aka Above The Law* - 1986)? That's definitely my pick too.
S: Yes that's it! That one fight scene, Cynthia vs a female villain character *[Karen Sheperd - Ed.]*, was really superb.
B: Yeah, with the chain! That's fantastic. Really though, all her scenes in that movie are amazing. She's second lead, behind Yuen Biao, but incredible as he is, she really steals the show. Even outside of the film's more famous / brutal scenes, that early set-piece where she's in a mahjong parlour, incapacitating and arresting all those guys, is just about the most graceful, witty, flat-out *cool* display of physical dexterity I've ever seen… up there with Jackie at his peak…
S: Yeah, absolutely.
B: So the other big one from this era of course would be Cynthia's debut in **Yes, Madam!** (1985), which is one of those frustrating Hong Kong movies that's kind of… half amazing.
S: That's the one with Michelle Yeoh, isn't it?
B: Yes. So all the stuff with Michelle and Cynthia kicking ass is just wonderful, but the effect is diminished by all this stuff with these goofy comic relief characters named after over-the-counter medicines *[played by Mang Hoi, and Tsai Hark, no less - Ed.]* …which seems to take up half the run-time, and doesn't really land at all, at least for us non-Cantonese / non-Chinese viewers…
S: Well, that's often the case with Hong Kong action movies from that time, ha. Anyway, who could have imagined Michelle Yeoh winning an Oscar decades later? She deserves it though, as she has been always amazing.
B: She should have won it for her dirt-bike stunt in 'Police Story 3' if there was any justice in the world. Hey, maybe we should run a campaign to get Cynthia an Oscar as well? I heard they're introducing a category for stunt people next year, so, although she's not exactly a stunt person… but she needs some kind of Oscar, definitely!
S: Yes, I'd vote for her.
B: Hey, are you in the 'Academy' now? But seriously folks, I think even though the films she made in Hong Kong are infinitely better in terms of their fight choreography & general wildness / energy than her American ones, even in HK, it feels as if directors and producers didn't really know how to make best use of her. She's always co-starring with somebody else, or just doing a

cameo, as kind of a novelty *gweilo* kung-fu lady. I think the only HK film she's actually top-billed in is **Lady Reporter** *(aka Blonde Fury* - 1989), which I don't actually remember much about, it's been so long… well, we'll watch it again soon. *[UPDATE: 'Lady Reporter' features some top drawer action & stunts, but in other respects feels a bit disjointed and scrappy.]* And as to the other Hong Kong movies… well, there's **Magic Crystal** (1986)…

S: I was gonna mention that! I love that movie!!

B: Hahahaha.

S: I know it's a bit shitty to some extent, but I enjoyed it.

B: I wouldn't say it's shit, but… it's some real Jing Wong craziness, that's for sure…

S: Yeah anyway. I just love it, it's like Goonies/Indiana Jones with but of E.T., and real martial arts involved…

B: Yes, and once again, the fighting in it is great, obviously.

S: With familiar faces like the late Richard Norton (R.I.P.), and also Andy Lau! It's a bit surprising to me that he was in it, probably because I first saw him in Wong Kar Wai films and he was more like, on the cool side of action movie stars, among the so-called 'HK's Four Heavenly Kings'. Well, that's my impression anyway.

B: …but again, I just find it frustrating, given that Cynthia only managed to make, like, six films or something in Hong Kong, that one of them had to be this mush-brained Jing Wong comedy sci-fi thing, instead of another movie on the level of 'Righting Wrongs'. But I confess, it's difficult not to enjoy it on its own crazy terms…

S: Oh hang on, she's in **The Inspector Wears Skirts** (1988) too, isn't she?

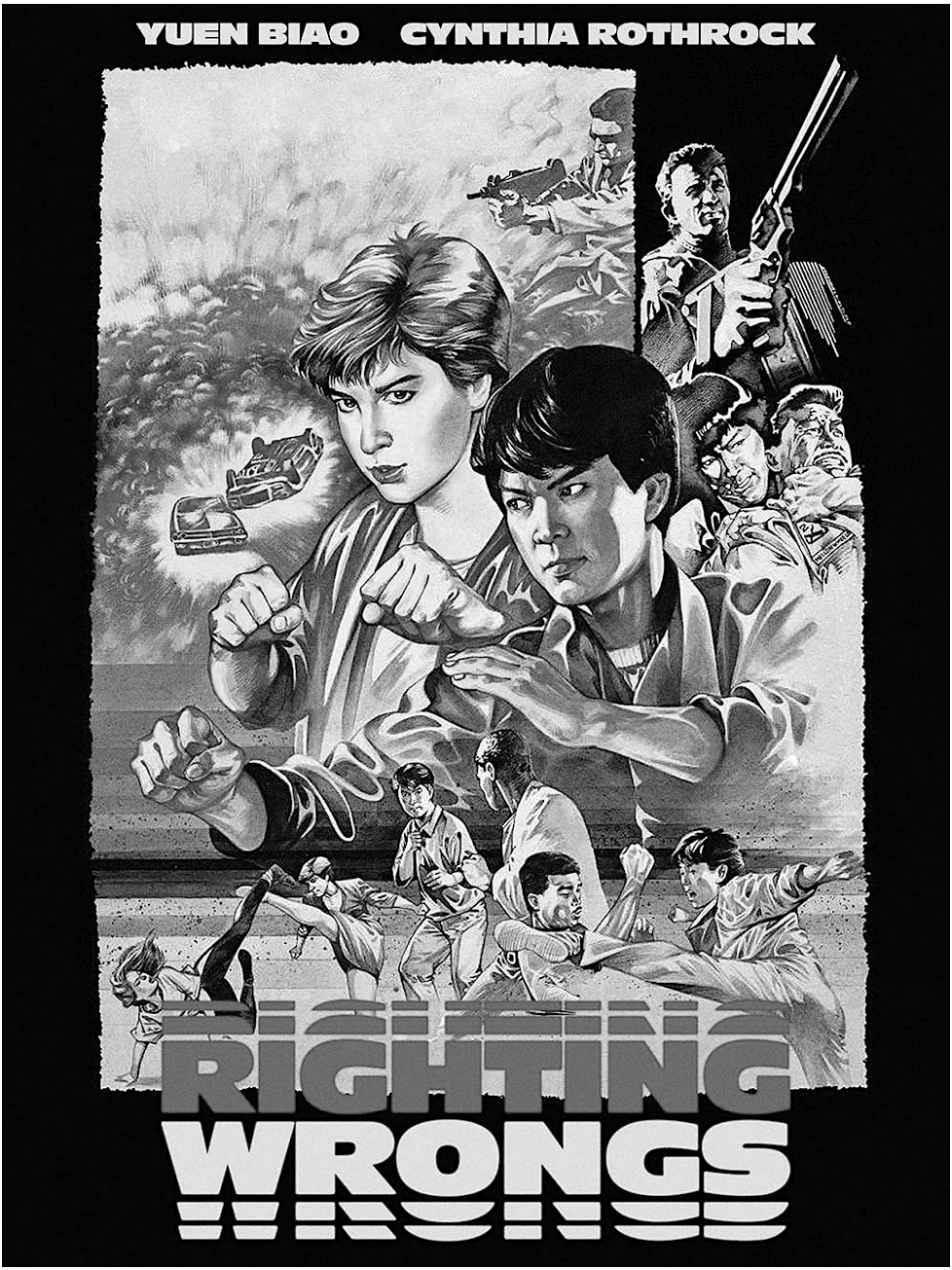
B: Yes, I was just going to mention that. Again, that's more of a cameo appearance, isn't it? She turns up as a kind of senior, bad-ass drill instructor type figure, who the other lady-police recruits are all scared of, I seem to recall? Also, it joins 'Lady Reporter' and 'Yes Madam!' in that peculiar sub-set of HK movies with those adorable "Women?! Doing stuff?!" kind of titles…

S: Hmm, that's the time in which they were made…

B: Surely even in Asia in the '80s though, they must have sounded a bit ridiculous? Well, anyway, 'The Inspectors Wears Skirts' was actually a lot of fun, don't you think?

S: The Japanese title translates as 'The Lady Squad: The Lady Prefers Guns'…

B: Haha, that's a much better title for a Girls with Guns type movie! Sadly though, it's not really one of those movies, is it? It's more just a goofy comedy really, kind of a female HK 'Police Academy'…


YUEN BIAO
CYNTHIA ROTHROCK
RIGHTING
WRONGS

S: Yes, a whole lot of silliness is definitely going on.
B: In this case though, the comedy actually works for me, at least to some extent. Possibly just because there are so many likeable people in the cast. And, there's some really fun action stuff at the end too! In fact, I liked it enough to buy the second one in the series… which was a mistake.
S: Haha, yeah.
B: But, mercifully, Cynthia is not in any of those sequels, so - NOT RELEVANT to our discussion. She does have another cameo though in Sammo Hung's epic **Millionaires' Express** (*aka Shanghai Express* - 1986*)* though, doesn't she?
S: I don't remember Cynthia's appearance in that one at all…
B: It's a bit of an over-packed movie isn't it? Too much stuff going on, and too many stars...it's difficult for them all to make an impression because there's so much to cram in. Cynthia is one of the gang of bad guys who attack the town or whatever, the bandits. My memory is she's mostly riding around on a horse with Richard Norton (again), and I think she has a one-on-one fight scene with Sammo, which you'd think we'd remember better… *[Indeed she does. It's as incredible as you'd hope. It's on Youtube. - Long-suffering Ed.]*
S: Oh yeah...why don't I remember that? Urgh!
B: We really should have, like, prepared for this, shouldn't we? Anyway - is that all her Hong Kong films? Were there any more?
S: In interviews, she always says that shooting in Hong Kong was really hard, which I can imagine. As her scenes were all so intense, it gives me an impression that she could have done many more... it's like quality over quantity. But in fact, since **China O'Brien** (1990), all her movies were basically made in America?
B: That's right. So what do you think of her American movies?
S: Well, I still like them, although they're less intense than the HK movies...
B: Yeah, that's for sure. Even though she has bigger star power within the low budget action realm when she returns to the USA, they still don't seem to know how to best use her, in terms of giving her decent parts, or allowing her to showcase her skills properly…
S: Undefeatable (1993) was made in America, right?
B: Yes, it was made in the USA, but directed by Godfrey Ho...so I was going to say, what's your favourite of the American films…?
S: 'Undefeatable', obviously!
B: Yeah, we don't even need to ask the question, do we? It's a thing of

beauty and a joy forever. Readers, please just watch it immediately.
S: The most incredible villain I've ever seen.
B: Yes, he does rather steal the movie, doesn't he, old Stingray…
S: OMG, yes, it's too much - unforgettable and literally undefeatable!
B: Again though, it's another one where Cynthia isn't the main good guy. As usual, she's playing second fiddle to this bland cop guy, but at least she gets to play quite an interesting character this time around - like, a female bare knuckle street fighter trying to save up money for her sister to go to a college by competing in weird, illegal tournaments…?
S: Yeah and she stands out, much more than the main cop guy.
B: Well, as always! And at least she's not playing a cop herself, for once.
S: Yes, that's probably my favourite character she did.
B: So, do you remember the OTHER movie that Godfrey Ho directed in America starring Cynthia? I think they were shot back-to-back, in Salt Lake City of all places. It's a real yin and yang situation though, because 'Undefeatable' is a pulp classic, just hugely entertaining and memorable, whereas the other one - I don't even remember the name - is extremely boring; probably one of her worst films.
S: Was it...**Honor and Glory** (1992)?
B: Yes, that's the one! *[Not to be confused with 'Rage and Honor', released the same year. - Ever-watchful Ed.]* Just shockingly dull. Instead, let's talk about **Bloody Mary Killer**, the alternate HK cut of 'Undefeatable'.
S: Why didn't I watch that?!
B: Because I watched it on my own.
S: Oh no, how could you?!
B: It's kind of amazing in terms of Godfrey Ho scholarship, because it finds him basically doing the OPPOSITE what he infamously did with all those IFD cut n' paste ninja movies - making a full length movie in the USA, with a predominantly white cast speaking English… and then cutting in awkward new scenes with Asian people speaking Cantonese, in order to sell it back to the Asian market! So… you remember, one of Stingray's early victims is this Karate champion guy, who gets thrown off the top of a multi-story car park?
S: Yes, I remember that.
B: Well, in 'Bloody Mary Killer', that guy's *brother* is some total bad-ass from Hong Kong, who flies over to America to to avenge him…
S: Wow, really?
B: …and so this alternate Hong Kong hero *[played by Robin Shou - Ed.]* gets involved in a completely different plot-line involving triads trying to take over a Chinese

restaurant in Salt Lake City, interspersed with scenes from the original movie. And then, the hilarious thing is, the ending plays out exactly as it does in 'Undefeatable', with Cynthia and Male Cop Guy taking down Stingray… but then it cuts back to the Hong Kong Hero Guy, who's just sitting around in a café, and someone's reading the newspaper, and says, 'Oh, I see the cops found that guy you were looking for, he's dead', and he's like, 'weeell, I guess that just about wraps things up for me here, time to head back to Hong Kong!'

S: Whaaaat?!

B: So he never gets to demonstrate his kung fu chops, or get his revenge. In a more traditional cut n' paste movie, they'd have given him his own little ending scene, with a discreet villain, to staple on at the end, but here they don't even bother. Well, I mean, how could they possibly beat Stingray's demise!? BUT ANYWAY, getting back to Cynthia's other US movies… the **China O'Brien** films are hard to really recommend, wouldn't you agree?

S: I still enjoyed watching Cynthia's performance in them, but yeah, it's a bit different.

B: Yeah, I mean, I think they have a nostalgic pull for a lot of people because they were so ubiquitous on

VHS, but… Robert Clouse just wasn't that great of an action director at the end of the day, sad to say, and the plot-lines are total hokum. Which isn't a deal-breaker for an action movie of course, but the MAIN problem is that there are just no decent baddies for the good guys to fight!

S: Oh yeah, that's true.

B: You've got a really strong line-up of goodies, with Cynthia, Richard

Norton (yes, him again) and… that other guy who does great kicks, playing the moody, Native American guy? *[Keith Cooke - eye-rolling Ed.]* So they're all really powerful, charismatic screen fighters… but then the baddies are just a bunch of lumbering rednecks taking orders from a non-fighting middle aged dude! So there's just no challenge or tension at all - they're literally knocking them down like bowling pins!

S: Hahaha. Was it that bad?

B: Well, that's my memory anyway. I think the second film addresses this somewhat by getting in some HK stunt guys, who play some *slightly* more capable bad guys, and the fight scenes get a bit wilder as a result… but still not exactly a must-see.

S: BTW, was Cynthia in the **Tiger Claws** series too? I only remember Donnie Yen was amazing in them...

B: No, you're getting confused with the 'Tiger CAGE' series, from Hong Kong. Those are great. 'Tiger CLAWS' are more DTV American ones, produced by & starring this guy Jalal Merhi. Y'know, they're about an underground cult of fighters who are murdering famous martial artists using the dreaded 'tiger claw' technique or something. Bolo Yeung is in them all…

S: Ah, Bolo Yeung... then what did Cynthia do?

B: I think she was another bloody cop.

S: OK, I remember, Bolo has a secret Dojo or something, doesn't he?

B: Yeah, something like that. I seem to recall the first one (from 1992) was quite fun, but it's downhill from there. All I remember about **Tiger Claws 2** (1996) is that, for some reason, Bolo's character is running a snack van. So we get to see him in a chef's outfit, cooking chips in the kitchen, which struck me as kind of surreal. That's literally all I remember.

S: Haha, I don't remember the film at all.

B: We should really drink less when we watch these things, shouldn't we? **Tiger Claws 3** (2001) was really bad though. Strangely, it has a slightly sci-fi angle, sort of a 'Mortal Kombat' thing, with fighters being summoned through a portal to another dimension, or something? But not as good as that sounds. Cynthia disappears after the opening scene too, which left us really disappointed. We discovered later though that this was because she was pregnant at the time of shooting.

S: Oh, yeah.

Fighting stances through the ages: ‘Magic Crystal’, ‘Yes Madam!’ and ‘Undefeatable’.

B: So, she was contractually obliged to appear in the film I think - but obviously she couldn't do any action scenes, so they killed off her character in the first act…
S: I see, yes, I remember now.
B: So how about the two **Martial Law** films? I quite like those. At the top end of Cynthia's US output, I'd suggest.
S: 'Martial Law'...what were they like...?
B: In the first one (1990), she's teamed up with Steve McQueen's son, Chad. And David Carradine is in it, as the bad guy! Actually doing some kung-fu! So, the set up has the usual problems shared by most of Cynthia's American films - lots of screen-time taken up by a less talented male guy, yet again she's a cop, and as usual, she has to pose as a hooker or something, for a sting operation…
S: Okay I see. But yes, that one's pretty good.
B: Yeah, I mean, the action clearly isn't up to Hong Kong standards, BUT, Cynthia does at least get to work through some pretty solid, extended fight sequences, even though no one else is anywhere near her level of skill… and there's some cool/funny character stuff, and the film as a whole is just quite charming and enjoyable…
S: Yes, it's like one of those 80s/90s L.A. cop B-movies, which I always enjoy.
B: Yes! Nice Santa Monica-shot kind of 'Hawaiian Shirt and a .45 in the belt buckle' vibe. **Martial Law II** (1991) is a bit of a drag though. It has Cynthia's boring male partner (who is no longer Chad McQueen) infiltrating an illegal kick-boxing ring, where all the men have really horrible, slicked back '90s ponytails. Which is a bit off-putting. But anyway, what else do we need to cover? Oh yeah, another really disappointing one was **Sworn to Justice** (1996), in which Cynthia plays a lawyer. It's pretty bland...
S: Ah...yes, that's the one where she does some sexy stuff, isn't it?
B: Yes, it has some near-nudity, and sex scenes etc...all feels quite uncomfortable, doesn't it?
S: I didn't like that. She had some romantic scenes in 'Martial Law' too, but this is a bit different...
B: Yeah. Because, in essence, the great thing about Cynthia Rothrock is that she was able to become a big-time female action star without EVER needing to trade on her looks, or sex appeal, or anything like that. I mean, ok, if you read reviews on IMDB etc, you'll find there are some male fans out there who, uh, *really, really like her*, let's say; but that's never why she's up there on the screen. Without intending any

unkindness, it's fair to say that she does not have conventional super-model good looks. But she doesn't *need* them, because she radiates the kind of magnetism and self-confidence befitting a woman who can swing her leg up vertically over her own shoulder from a standing start to kick the head of an opponent standing directly behind her. Combine this with the fact that she usually plays characters who are not defined in terms of their relationships to men, and her screen presence feels absolutely joyous and (dare I say) empowering. Which is why we're watching all these movies, let's face it…

S: Absolutely, because she's a master of martial arts, karate, taekwondo, everything…

B: ..she can pretty much kick the ass of anyone else in the film industry, and has belts and championship titles to prove it. So I guess what we're saying is… 'doing a sex' to liven up a tedious U.S.-made B-movie feels like a sad and unnecessary career move, even though she probably justified it at the time as an attempt to expand her 'range' as an actress and so on…

S: Yes, I personally prefer her presentation in the Hong Kong films, even though it seemed like really hard and dangerous work. I like the way that the HK filmmakers didn't treat her as an 'actress', they simply considered her as a professional fighter, regardless the gender, which brought out the best in her performances, allowing her to express herself through her martial arts. And, I like her hairstyle at that time too, actually!

B: Like that 'Princess Di' kind of cut?

S: Yeah, she was like a tomboy, it's probably my favourite look for her. It's a bit nostalgic for me as I had similarly short hair when I was a teenager, playing basketball. So did a lot of female sportspeople around me. By the time of 'Sworn to Justice', she was a mature lady, but hmm, I don't know if she needed to do so much 'acting'…!

B: I suppose it was probably considered a necessity, to be taken seriously in America…

S: She's much more attractive and sexy to me when she is fighting though!

B: Yeah, completely. Being an action star is a totally different concept from being a conventional, dramatic actor, which you'd think the people making these films would understand. I mean, it's not like Bruce Lee ever had to take classes with Lee Strasberg or some shit, right?! Or come to think of it, do you think Cynthia's male contemporaries like Van Damme or Seagal ever had to deal with this "oh, you need to expand your range as an actor" crap? Difficult to imagine. I hope

that this wasn't one of the factors which led to her career tailing off towards the end of the '90s… but I have no idea TBH, so I shouldn't speculate.
S: She's been very active again recently though, she was actually in a few films released in 2024/2025…
B: Yeah, well, she keeps on trucking, has she's certainly never been short on enthusiasm! Surely she would be number # 1 on the call list for a female version of 'The Expendables'…
S: In that case, who else should be in it? Michelle Yeoh?
B: Something tells me she probably has better things to do these days.
S: Oh hang on, I actually just found that Cynthia did actually make a movie like this… 'Expendable Ladies' is the Japanese title!
B: Oh no, really?!
S: English title is **Mercenaries** (2014). It says here it's part of an 'original video series' from The Asylum… plot ripped off from 'The Expendable 3: World Mission'…
B: Oh God. I'm so sorry she needed to do that. The sad thing is though, now we'll have to watch it.
S: Yeah. I'm still up for any of Cynthia's movies, no matter how bad.
B: We've got lots of earlier ones still to cover first though… 'Lady Dragon', 'Triple Cross', 'Angel The Kickboxer' (that was another Godfrey Ho one, it seems)… and hey, did you know that in 1993 she made a buddy-cop movie with Stacy Keach?! Now THAT'S a way to learn how to act…
S: It never ends…
B: I hope it never ends.

Cynthia Rothrock's self-produced 2025 action-western **Black Creek** is available now via your friendly local corporate streaming platform. Visit cynthiarothrockofficial.com - you won't regret it.

Screengrabs used in this piece are respectfully borrowed from rockshockpop.com. (Thanks Ian!)

AIR PORT
HOSPITAL
HOTEL
皇家師姐

END NOTES

Without wishing to go all 'Oscar speech' on you, a few quick thanks are probably in order.

Firstly, a shout-out to Keith Allison (Teleport City) and the late & much-missed Todd Stadtman (Danger!Die!Die!Kill!), whose writing on global pop cinema provided the primary catalyst for setting me off on this sorry trajectory, back in the halcyon days of the internet.

Secondly, thanks to the following publications for helping convince me that printing stuff on paper could be a plausible prospect in the 21st century: **Alternative Strategies**, **The Books Review of Books**, **Bedabbled**, **Kill You Last**. Look out for 'em.

But most of all, what a great audience! Sincere thanks for picking this thing up and reading it. I hope you gained something from the experience.

Future issues are a spectral question mark at this point, but nonetheless - feedback, criticism, corrections, ideas, **submissions for future issues**, random cult movie chat and whatever else are all welcomed at:

breakfastintheruins@googlemail.com

Oh, and I nearly forgot - COMPETITION! Correctly identify the movie this issue's cover image is taken from, and win a free copy of the next issue, if and when it exists.

VENTURE INSIDE, IF YOU DARE, FOR…

- Kung-fu witches of Jakarta
- Johnny Cash machine-gun massacres
- Mixed up vampires & a total lack of moths in ‘50s Japan
- Cynthia Rothrock chat (about, not with)